

10 Tips On How To Pass The AAPC's CPC Exam:

(I took the exam online just recently. Please be aware of all the prep work that is needed to take advantage of this option.)

(I cannot, and won't, take credit for most of these tips as I've done a lot of research and have gotten great tips and ideas from other sources.)

- Approach answering scenarios by using process of elimination. Do NOT code scenarios from scratch. This takes too much time. You only have roughly 2 minutes for each question. Look at the multiple choice and weed out the ones you know are not correct. Sometimes, if you're certain on the first and sometimes second codes, and those are the only ones of their kind, you don't even need to look up the other codes for that scenario if there are any, just move on. Sometimes all the codes are the same, or close to the same, and it's just a certain modifier that's correct. If you're certain on that modifier, boom. You're done with that question.
- You will be spending the most time in the CPT book. There are way more CPT questions than ICD or HCPCS.
- Skip questions you don't know or might be too lengthy and go back and answer them if you have time. The goal is to not spend too much time on one question. I kept track of the ones I skipped AND the ones I answered but wasn't 100% sure on. Turned out I had 40 minutes after completing the exam to not only go back and answer the ones I skipped, but also go over the ones I wasn't sure on. I caught quite a few mistakes! If you are running out of time, and you have unanswered questions but do not have time to look up answers, just guess. You have a 25% chance of getting it right, and it's better than leaving it blank.
- Know your medical terminology. There are a few questions on the exam that are basic terminology or anatomy questions. They're very short, and if you are strong in these areas, this is a great place to gain momentum and get extra minutes for the harder, longer questions. (I read somewhere that all answers to all questions can be found in your coding books. I tried this, and it helped a lot. If there is a term, root word, or body part that has slipped your memory, try looking up the unfamiliar word in the index of the ICD-10-CM or CPT manual, and if needed, track it to the tabular list where sometimes more clues are given. I was able to answer some questions by using this technique. There are also really helpful anatomical illustrations in the front of the HCPCS manual.)

- This was something I thought to do that helped me: I quickly looked at the multiple choice to see where in the CPT book I needed to be BEFORE reading the scenario. That way when I was done reading, I was already in that section and could just look down and be right where I needed to be, instead of reading the scenario, turning the pages while forgetting the details I had just read, and having to read the scenario again. This helped me tremendously, but everyone is different and this strategy may not be for everyone.
- Have notes written in your books and important info highlighted (i.e. different anatomical sites, codes related to age, key components in the E/M section, codes related to time, and codes related to size, gender etc.. You cannot have loose papers, post-its or papers taped to the inside of your book... those are not allowed, but there is no limit on the notes you can have written in your book. (I suggest writing in pencil, as you can erase easier.)
- Have your books tabbed! Very important to make use of those tabs that come with your books! This makes finding things SO much easier and saves so much time.
- Know your guidelines, for both CPT and ICD. Tab the main important ones in the chapter guidelines section of your ICD-10-CM manual (i.e. Neoplasms, diabetes, MI, Hypertension, Sepsis, Pain, SIRS, etc...)
- Pay very close attention to the parenthetical instructions for the CPT codes. Many correct answers rely on you following those instructions!
- For me, the exam was not as difficult as I made it up to be. I was imagining the worst. The questions are not out to trick you. When you're pretty positive you've got the correct answer, don't sit & ponder about it, just keep moving. Go into the exam with a positive attitude. Tell yourself that you've prepared as well as possible, and that you WILL pass!